

Good Morning!

I am writing to encourage you to support the passage of the State Grant Commitment on School Building Projects (HB 5304). I am sure there are many worthy investments that are included in this bill, but the one that I wanted to address specifically is the development of Shepaug Valley School into the state's twentieth AgSTEM program.

In the interest of full disclosure, I am a Special Education teacher at Shepaug, as well as a resident of Washington, CT. I have followed the AgSTEM proposal's process with great interest. There has been a great deal of focus on the wonderful preparation that AgSTEM programs give to students who are bound for top colleges and universities. The careers that will be open to these students are fantastic to envision.

In my role as Special Educator, I often encounter students who have become disenchanted with the education process and, for one reason or another, are not considering college after graduation. I work with students, both currently and in past positions, who feel that school is not for them. They feel that there is little to engage them and address their learning styles. These are the "hands-on learners" who may have difficulty studying Shakespeare, but can rebuild an engine. These students often get in trouble in school, and sometimes drop out. I recently ran a PPT for a student in Nonnewaug's AgStem program. He told the adults in the room that, without a doubt, if it were not for his Ag classes, he would have dropped out long ago.

Besides preparing highly motivated students for careers that have not even been created yet, an AgSTEM program also addresses the students who traditionally have had difficulties in school. It teaches a work ethic that cannot be taught in academic classes and gives them real skills that can be used in the workplaces that they will encounter after leaving high school. In short, an AgSTEM program benefits all students. A rising tide lifts all boats.

As a taxpayer, I have given my commitment to pay my part of the costs of making Shepaug the state's twentieth AgSTEM program. I did this with the expectation that the State of Connecticut would be assisting with the project. I urge you to support the passage of this bill on behalf of all of the students who will benefit from an AgSTEM education.

Sincerely,

Jim McDonough  
38 Kielwasser Road  
Washington, CT

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